Characteristics of
Private Nonindustrial
Forest Landowners
in Alabama

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The State of Alabama is well endowed with timber. It has been estimated by the Southern Forest Experiment Station of the USDA Forest Service that there are 21,742,000 acres of forest land in the State. Of this amount, 16,667,100 acres are owned by private nonindustrial owners. This group, the subject of this study, owns 76.7 per cent of Alabama's total forest land and 66.5 per cent of its total land area.

Forest-based industries make up one of the most important sectors of the economy of the State of Alabama. The Southern Forest Institute reported in 1968 that Alabama was second only to Georgia in the production of pulpwood (round wood and chips). During the same year the Alabama Forestry Commission reported that the sawmills in the State produced 867.9 million board feet of pine and 305.5 million board feet of hardwood lumber. In addition 44.3 million board feet of pine logs and 24.4 million board feet of hardwood logs were shipped out of the State, and 525.3 thousand crossties, 122.2 tons of stumpwood, and 375.1 thousand poles and pilings were produced.

Much has been said and written about the future demand for wood and what must be done to satisfy this demand. Many who are familiar with this problem have concluded that the supply will have to come from private nonindustrial forest land holdings. To make rational plans concerning this supply of wood it is necessary to know something about the people who possess it.

STUDY METHODS

For the purpose of this study, the private nonindustrial forest landowner was defined as a landowner who had at least 20 acres of forest land regardless of how much nonforested land he may

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have owned. All industrial, State, Federal, and municipal own-
ships were excluded.

All 67 counties in the State were sampled by a multistage sam-
ppling design in which the counties were the primary sampling
units. Three townships were randomly selected in each county. Within these townships two sections were then randomly selected and two persons (owning 20 acres or more of forest land) were randomly selected from each section. Townships without at least two sections containing two forest landowners other than wood-
based industries were discarded and new townships drawn. In this way variance among townships and within townships as well as among sections could be determined. Data were obtained through personal interviews with landowners.

The survey produced two different types of answers. The first type was quantitative, such as total number of acres owned, total number of forest land acres owned, and length of tenure. The second type of answer produced a discrete variable such as “yes” or “no.” (See Appendix for questionnaire.)

The totals, means, and standard error of the means were cal-
culated for the total sample. These represented the total popula-
tion. The same was done for each of the 67 counties. A two-
tailed “t” test was performed for each characteristic to determine whether the means of the individual counties differed significantly from statewide means. For those characteristics whose statistics could not be analyzed in the above manner because they were binomial in nature (yes or no) a test of proportionality was used. This also was a two-tailed test. Each county proportion was com-
pared with the State proportion to determine if there was a sig-
nificant difference.

All testing for significance was at the 0.05 level of probability. Differences reported were significant at this level.

OWNERS AND LAND AREA

The results of this study indicate that, on the average, the pri-
ivate nonindustrial landowner, with 20 or more acres of forest land, had 62.6 per cent of his holdings in forest land.

The respondents to the questionnaire used in this study pos-
sessed 2.0 per cent of the total land area in the State and 2.0 per cent of the State’s forest land.

ACREAGE OWNED, ALL CLASSES OF LAND

The total acreage owned by respondents was slightly in excess of 660,000 acres. The average number of acres owned was 717.0,
with a range of 20 to 80,070 acres. The median was 157 acres, and the mode was 80 acres.

In 11 of the counties average acreage owned did not differ from the State average, Figure 1. However, 45 of the counties had lower averages and 11 of the counties had higher averages than that for the entire State.

**FOREST LAND ACRES OWNED**

The respondents to this survey owned slightly more than 402,000 acres of forest land. The average forest land holding across the State was 436.9 acres while the range was from 20 to 66,400 acres and the median was 80 acres.

Eleven of the county averages did not differ from the State average of 436.9 acres, but 41 counties had lower and 15 had higher averages than the State, Figure 2.

Forest land holdings were arbitrarily divided into six ownership area classes.

Slightly more than one-third of the respondents owned less than 60 acres of timberland and slightly more than three-fourths of them owned less than 250 acres, Table 1. The small woodland owner has been defined by the USDA Forest Service as being an owner having less than 5,000 acres of forest land. Only nine respondents, approximately 1 per cent of those sampled, would not fit this definition of a small forest landowner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-59</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-249</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250-499</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-749</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>759-999</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>92.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 +</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>924</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FOREST LAND AS A PER CENT OF TOTAL AREA OWNED**

For all respondents the forest land averaged 62.6 per cent of the total land owned, while the range was from 4.0 to 100.0 per cent, the median was 62.5 per cent, and the mode was 100.0 per cent. The percentage of forest land owned by the respondents of this study is consistent with the percentage of forest land in
FIG. 1. Acreage owned, all classes of land.

FIG. 2. Forest land acres owned.
the State, estimated at 66.5 per cent including industrial, State, Federal, and municipal ownerships. Thus the proportion of forest land in the sample is representative of the State of Alabama.

Averages of 6 of the counties differed from the State average, Figure 3. The averages in 34 of the counties were lower and in 27 higher than the State average.

Slightly more than 70 per cent of the respondents had at least one-half of their total holdings in forest lands, Table 2. Almost 30 per cent had at least 80 per cent forest land and 13.9 per cent owned forest land only.

Table 2. Forest Land Owned as a Per Cent of Total Acreage Owned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Accumulated respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-19</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-99</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AGE OF OWNERS

The average age for all respondents was 57.6 years while the range was from 21 to 95 years, the median age was 60 years, and the modal age was 57 years.

In 11 of the counties there was no difference between the county and State means, Figure 4. Twenty-two of the counties had a higher average age and 34 had a lower average age.

Table 3. Age Classes of Owners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age class</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Accumulated respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 29</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 and older</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than 71.1 per cent of the respondents were at least 50 years old and 45.6 per cent or almost one-half were 60 years old or older.
FIG. 3. Proportion of forest land in sample ownership.

FIG. 4. Average age of owners.
SEX OF OWNERS

For the State 79.7 per cent of the respondents were males. In 56 of the counties the percentage did not differ from the State mean, Figure 5. In 3 of the counties there was a smaller proportion and in 8 of the counties a higher proportion of male landowners than the average for the State.

OCCUPATION OF OWNERS

The occupation represented most frequently was that of "farmer." Included in this category were those respondents who indicated that they were farmers but were supplementing their income by running stores or working at some other occupation on a part-time basis. A portion of the respondents classified as "retired" were at one time or another "farmers." In the "all others" classification there were more "homemakers" than any other occupation. "Farmer" was the most frequently represented occupation in 26 counties, "retired" in 12 counties, and "employee" (those working for wages) in 12 counties. In the remaining 17 counties no one occupation predominated since two or more occupations were represented with equal frequency.

Table 4. Occupation of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Pct.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All others</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DOMICILE OF OWNERS

Statewide, 78.4 per cent of the forest landowners responding to this study lived on their property. The remaining 24.6 per cent were considered absentee landowners. In 48 counties, the county proportion did not differ from that of the State, Figure 6. There were 8 of the counties that had more absentee landowners and 11 counties had a higher proportion of the landowners living on their property than was the case for the State.

HOW OWNER'S PROPERTY WAS ACQUIRED

In reply to this question 68.4 per cent of the respondents stated that they purchased their property, 21.7 per cent had inherited the property they now controlled, and 9.9 per cent had purchased...
FIG. 5. Sex of owner.

FIG. 6. Domicile of owners.
some of their land and inherited a portion of their land. The proportion of ownerships acquired by purchase did not differ from the State mean in approximately 70 per cent of the counties, Figure 7.

**OWNER'S EDUCATION**

For the purpose of this study, grade school was defined as 1 through 8 years; high school, 9 through 12 years; college, 13 through 16 years; and post graduate, anything beyond 16 years of formal education.

Slightly less than one-half of all respondents attended high school, Table 5. All did not graduate. In 39 of the counties the most frequently given answer was "high school," and "grade school" was most frequently given in 20 of the counties.

**Table 5. Education of Owners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Pct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade school</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post graduate</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHERE THE LANDOWNER WAS RAISED**

In response to the question—where were you raised—on a farm or in the city?—90.1 per cent stated that they were raised on a farm. In 63 of the counties the respondents raised on the farm did not differ from the proportion for the entire State, Figure 8. The remaining 4 counties had lower proportions.

**WHERE THE FATHER OF THE FOREST LANDOWNER WAS RAISED**

Proportionally more of the fathers of the respondents were raised on farms than were the respondents themselves. Statewide, 94.8 per cent of the owners’ fathers were raised on farms and the remaining 5.2 per cent were raised in the city. In 63 of the counties the proportions did not differ from that of the State, Figure 9. In 4 of the counties the proportion of respondents whose fathers were farm-reared was lower.

**EDUCATION OF FOREST LANDOWNER'S FATHER**

In general the father of the forest landowner had less formal education than did the forest landowner himself. The largest
FIG. 7. How land was acquired.

FIG. 8. Where landowner was raised.
class was “grade school” with 55.8 per cent of the total, followed by “high school” with 19.0 per cent, and “no formal education” with 17.6 per cent.

The most frequently given answer in 53 of the counties was “grade school.”

**TENURE OF FOREST LANDOWNER**

The average length of tenure for respondents was 24.2 years. Both the median and mode were 20 years, and the range was from 1 to 70 years. In 5 of the counties average tenure did not differ from the State average, in 26 of the counties average tenure was higher, and in 36 it was lower than the State average, Figure 10.

**LENGTH OF TIME PROPERTY WAS IN FAMILY**

Statewide, the average length of time that the land of the respondents was in the family was 37.5 years. The median was 25 years, the mode was 20 years, and the range was from 1 to 250 years. For 10 of the counties there was no difference between the county and State means, Figure 11. Thirty-three of the counties had lower averages and 24 of the counties had higher averages than the State.
FIG. 9. Where landowner's father was raised.

FIG. 10. Tenure of forest landowner.
FIG. 11. Length of time property was in family.

FIG. 12. Forest landowner's race.
FOREST LANDOWNER’S RACE

For the entire State 91.3 per cent of the forest landowners were white and 8.7 per cent were non-white. In 55 of the counties the proportional division did not differ from that of the State. The remaining 12 of the counties had a lower proportion of white forest landowners than the State in general, Figure 12.

IN SUMMATION—THE “AVERAGE” FOREST LANDOWNER

The “average” forest landowner in Alabama with 20 acres or more of forest land is a white male who owns, on the average, 717 acres of land of which 437 acres are forested. He is 57.6 years of age and is a farmer with a high school education. He was raised on a farm and lives on his property. He purchased most of his property and has held his property for an average of 24 years.

APPENDIX

Alabama Forest Land Ownership Characteristic Study
1. County__________________________________________
2. Name__________________________________________
3. Address________________________________________
4. Legal description: R_____ T_____ Sec__________
5. Area: a) total in property all sections ___________ acres;
   b) woodland ___________ acres; c) per cent in woodland
   ___________%
6. Age:__________
7. Sex:____________
8. Occupation:____________________________________
9. Live on property: a) Yes__________ b) No__________
10. How was property acquired: a) purchased___________
    b) inherited_________________ c) other____________
11. Education: a)_________ years; b) highest degree_______
    major_____________________
12. Were you raised on a) farm__________; b) city__________
13. Where was father raised: a) farm__________; b) city__________
14. Fathers education: a)_________ years b) highest degree_______
    c) major_____________________
15. Length of tenure: a)_________years; b) years in family______.